

## RECOVERING SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES IN A REALISTIC LOCAL FILM: THE VALUE OF A LOCAL FILM IN THE AGE OF POSTMODERNISM

SUNG KYUNG KIM

*University of Essex*

*I start from a view in which the postmodern turn has brought significant changes to everyday lives of individuals as well as the scope of social science. The postmodern turn would provide new possibilities for social science that has been overwhelmingly 'scientifically' based. By keeping critical distances from both too narrow 'scientific approaches' and extreme post-modernistic perspectives, I would suggest a well-balanced postmodern social theory between the two, which can become even a more powerful tool when it is reconciled to a certain aspect of the realistic approach. To acknowledge the importance of realism in the postmodern turn can rightly broaden the scope of social science into the inclusion of art, emotionality, sensuality, phenomenology, hermeneutics and so on that have been neglected in social science, and avoid the confusions of identity brought about by a lack of understanding of history, culture and society. Combined with this theoretical stance, I would argue that locally embedded cultural artefacts, especially realistic local films, take an important role for audiences to anchor their confused identities and to restore the sense of history, place and culture. As an example, I will analyse a realistic film text on a shared past, *Spring in My Hometown* (1997, dir. Yi Kwangmo) to illustrate the importance of a realistic film text as a cultural resource for audiences.*

**Key Words:** *postmodern turn, social science, realism, local films, identities, culture*

### INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the postmodern turn has remained a controversial issue in social theory for the last two decades. Post-structuralist and post-modern authors such as Foucault (1973; 1980), Lyotard (1984), and Baudrillard (1983; 1988), alongside the French nihilists Deleuze and Guattari (1977; 1987) claim the emergence of a new era, called the post-modern turn. This move has resulted from criticism of the modern rationalist reconstruction of Enlightenment thoughts. On the other hand, some authors, especially German critical theorists, argue that the modernist project, as an ideal but not as a reality, remains uncompleted. On this line of thought, the post-modern turn as a distinct rupture from

modernity is illusory (Habermas, 1987; see also Smart, 1990; Ashley, 1990; Bernstein, 1985). No matter whether we agree or disagree with these arguments, it is perhaps reasonable to say that the contemporary era shows significant changes and differences when compared to the previous times. These changes are meaningful as they affect people's everyday lives, practices and identities. Moreover, postmodernism broadens the scope of social science by embracing several areas such as emotionality, sensuality, phenomenological perspectives, and hermeneutics that have been largely ignored in scientifically based social analyses. In this paper, I hope to clarify the values and benefits of the postmodern turn in social theory by keeping a critical distance from extreme postmodernists who deny the existence of the 'real' and united and coherent identity. Then, I will argue that post-modernistic social theory can become a more powerful tool when it is reconciled to a certain aspect of the realistic approach. In addition, I will illustrate that there are benefits in interconnecting postmodernism with realism through the analysis of realistic film texts on a shared past. I maintain that such films can help people locate themselves in a larger social and cultural framework as audiences can find inherited social and cultural dispositions in film. By doing this, the postmodern self can cope with a crisis of identity and schizophrenic experiences. As examples of film text, this chapter will closely interpret one rather realistic film, *Spring in My Hometown* (1997, South Korea).

#### THE VALUE OF THE POSTMODERN TURN IN SOCIAL THEORY

The modern is a new epoch clearly distinguished from the ancient (Habermas, 1981: 3-4). Historically, the modern starts in Enlightenment thought and advocates its values such as rationality, progress, human emancipation, and science over religion. A more specific way of making this definition is offered by Giddens: the modern can be characterised through two dimensions, i.e., 'industrialism' and 'capitalism' (Giddens, 1991: 15-20). Modern societies and social life have experienced increasingly faster and wider ranges of social change brought about by industrialism and capitalism. Turner defines these as:

the domination of asceticism, secularization, the universalistic claims of instrumental rationality, the differentiation of the various spheres of the life-world, and the bureaucratization of economic, political and military practices and the growing monetarization of

values (1990: 6)

Similarly, Bell (1976) conceptualises 'industrial society' as a key feature of modern social life, and argues for a new phase of industrial society, so-called 'post-industrial society', based on the centrality of knowledge and information that brings 'post-modern' society. In a post-industrial society, the unity, coherence and rationality of social systems, which could be found in previous industrial society, is no longer as distinct.

The postmodern turn, on the other hand, can be understood in various terms such as the 'computerization of society' and the 'end of metanarrative' (Lyotard, 1984); the 'information revolution' and 'post-industrial society' (Bell, 1976); 'time-space compression' (Harvey, 1989), 'simulacra' (Baudrillard, 1983), and the cultural domination of 'post-industrial society', 'consumer society', 'spectacle or image society', 'media society' and 'information society' (Jameson, 1991). In particular, Lyotard (1984), one of the pioneers in the debate on postmodernity, argues that modern ideas of universal truth and metanarrative, especially Marxism, are out-of-date in post-industrial societies. Instead of being pessimistic about this, he maintains that the replacement of metanarrative by language games would enable us to look at pluralistic perspectives and the diversity of local knowledge. Lyotard's claim of the end of metanarrative implies a focus on emerging voices, practices and the identities of marginalised people such as the black, women, sexual minorities and the 'Other.' McRobbie, in this sense, argues that a crisis in Western knowledge has opened the space for those who were ignored and isolated by the modern metanarrative to articulate their identities, cultures and practices (McRobbie, 1985: 61-74). Thus, the postmodern turn can be characterised as a postmodernism of resistance that engages in social criticism and subversion (Foster, 1983: ix-xvi). This is made possible through stressing 'otherness and marginality, valorising the culture and practices of individuals and groups excluded from mainstream culture, and thus generating a cultural studies of the margins and oppositional voices' (Durham and Kellner, 2001: 515; see also Best and Kellner, 1997: 9). One of the main advantages of postmodernism is indeed its challenge to modernist projects, which in its questioning of the grand narrative and the master claim of universal truth especially, breaks up modern, and overly narrow, dichotomous stereotypes of rationality over irrationality (emotion), unity over diversity, solidity over fluidity, fixity over openness, white over Others,

and men over women.

Furthermore, these benefits help social science to enlarge its scope to include culture, art, humanities, identity, language, phenomenology, hermeneutics, emotion and unconsciousness, and adopt different methodological approaches. The influence of postmodernism leads social scientists to question a narrowly defined social science that must be 'scientific.' In this vein, Featherstone (1988: 205) argues that a postmodern sociology is required to overcome the generalizing, systematizing and rationalising tendencies in sociology. In addition, those areas that were considered as the periphery of social science, especially art, culture, and humanities, have become major areas of sociology in the postmodern turn (Featherstone, 1988).

While scientific social analyses which are too narrowly defined drain rich essences of the postmodern sociology, an extreme postmodern sociology which dismisses 'scientific' approaches outright is hardly able to inherit the role of 'sociological imagination' in its analysis of the complicated relationship between society and the individual in the contemporary world. It seems to us that the binary opposition between modernity and postmodernity based on the idea of 'rupture' and an 'epochal break' between the two is not sophisticated enough to capture the dynamic and rich mechanism of the social world and the self. The elements of the universal and the individual, of the rational and the irrational, of the objective and the subjective, and of the modern and the postmodern have been, and will be, mixed and dispersed in the social world. In this sense, combining the two perspectives appropriately depending on the context is perhaps crucial for social scientists. Thus, several social theorists, such as Bernstein, Fraser, Harding, Nicholson, Seidman and Stones, attempt to utilise postmodernism's value in order to rethink modern theory and (still) central features such as truth, reality, objectivity, ethics, and normative critique (Best and Kellner, 1997: 25).

#### FACING THE CONFUSION OF IDENTITY IN THE AGE OF POSTMODERNISM

A rather extreme view on postmodernism can be found in Baudrillard's claim of 'simulacra.' Baudrillard (1983) argues that we can no longer separate the economic from the realms of ideology or culture. Cultural artefacts, representations, and media images are overwhelmingly dominant so that these simulations have become more

real than the real itself. In the realm of the hyperreal, the boundary between the 'real' and 'simulation' collapses. It is impossible to rediscover the real as well as illusion as 'illusion is no longer possible, because the real is no longer possible' (Baudrillard, 1994 in Durham and Kellner, 2001: 534). Baudrillard and other extreme postmodernists, in this sense, tend to call into question the existence of the real or of a single reality, and to dismiss modern projects completely (Baudrillard, 1983; Poster, 1995). However, his argument raises crucial ontological questions: is there no 'real' at all in the end? Can the real be dismissed so easily? If only simulations surround us, what do those simulations re-present? Are they merely replication, parody and pastiche?

It is an important point for us that the breakdown between the 'real' and images tends to exaggerate certain aspects of the postmodern. Stones argues that the massive influence of postmodernism in social theory mistakenly leads to the construction of an anti-realism. He maintains that postmodernism is valuable as a critique of modernism as it emphasises the importance of a plurality of perspective and local and contextual studies in the place of grand narratives. It also stresses fluidity, openness and disorder (1996: 22). However, postmodernism does not mean the rejection of all forms of reality and the absence of 'the real'. By accepting the contributions of postmodernism both to social theory and empirical research, we can grasp a richer level of the 'real'. The important thing is that postmodernism should be used for grasping 'the real' and its sophisticated features in more appropriate ways.

Furthermore, postmodernism also contributes to clarifying the postmodern social self. According to Hall (1992: 274-291), the modern social self, which is stable, fixed and constructed, seems to be replaced by the decentred or postmodern self that is open, contradictory, unfinished, and fragmented. Bauman clearly recognises the difference between a modern and a postmodern identity as follows:

'If the modern 'problem of identity' was how to construct an identity and keep it solid and stable, the postmodern 'problem of identity' is primarily how to avoid fixation and keep the options open. If the case of identity .... the catchword of modernity was creation; the catch world of postmodernity is recycling' (Bauman, 1996: 18 cited in McCrone, 1998: 31).

It is perhaps reasonable to say that individuals hold several

competing identities at the same time, and they identify with different identities at different times and situations. Identity in the postmodern turn is indeed changeable or movable in relation to 'the ways we are represented or addressed in the cultural systems which surround us' (Hall, 1992: 277).

Gergen, one of extreme postmodernists, criticises the unified and constructed modern identity by drawing on his psychological experiments as evidence. He argues that people have multiple or even 'schizophrenic' identities since they have diverse human relations with others (Gergen, 1991; 1995). Although Gergen recognises the central tendencies of the self, he argues that we fail to face up to the fact that there are many potential selves within us (Gergen, 1995). However interesting Gergen's argument may be, it is open to two critical problems. First of all, Gergen's evidence based on experiments to support his argument tends to be rather limited and superficial. The social world and human relations in the 'real' are perhaps far more complicated and contain many socio-cultural factors that cannot be controlled. Moreover, even if one behaves in a particular way in a constructed circumstance, it does not mean that this is merely the effect of a series of unrelated multiple identities. It is rather a question of diverse roles and behaviours rather than that of identities. These roles and actions could be interpreted further as a manifestation of the diversity of intentions; thus people adapt behaviour within multiple social settings in every single moment (MacIntyre, 1981/2; 190-5).

Secondly, Gergen does not pay enough attention to the essentialist notion of the self nor to a coherent and unified identity across diverse roles and selves. It becomes problematic if Gergen uses role, action and identity interchangeably, and then focuses on finding out the differences between each role and action. MacIntyre points out that the separation between the individual and the roles, and between different roles, prevents us from grasping the unity of a human life (MacIntyre, 1981/2: 190-1). People have diverse roles and masks, and change them depending on circumstances and social relations, but they still hold core and unified features rooted in the essential social self at a substantial level. Each mask, role and action retains a sense of continuity and also the unities of character and the self. In this sense, McRobbie argues that we should invest our best efforts in unearthing natural, unified and hidden identity. Without the discovery and realisation of this, McRobbie argues, it is impossible to (re)create hybridised, different and new identities in relation to diverse social relations and circumstances

(McRobbie, 1985: 61-74; see also Hall, 1992).

Moreover, the idea of 'schizophrenic identities' in the postmodern turn suggests the loss of a sense of history and a general loss of meaning. The postmodern subject suffers from "historical amnesia" due to a lack of knowledge as to the correct language articulation between signifier and signified (Jameson, 1985: 117-9). In other words, Jameson argues that

'schizophrenic experience is an experience of isolated, disconnected, discontinuous, material signifiers which fail to link up into a coherent sequence. The schizophrenic thus does not know personal identity in our sense, since our feeling of identity depends on our sense of the persistence of the "I" and the "me" over time' (Jameson, 1985: 119; see also Jameson, 1984).

This leads to a claim of a crisis of identity. According to Hall (1990: 59), social and cultural identities are composed of both tradition- and future-based identities. While tradition-based cultural identities focus on a stable, fixed and unchanging cultural entity by tracing a common culture from the past, future-based identities are equally connected with both the future and the past. Identities are 'subject to the continuous "play" of history, culture and power.' That is, 'we integrate the past, present and future, and thereby constitute stable, coherent identities on both a personal and communal level' (Hinchman and Hinchman, 1997: 2).

Gaining a sense of history in order to avoid the postmodern confusion of identity requires that the human being, as a storyteller, must construct its own narrative of an individual life that usually interacts with historical and social narratives. A narrative of the self about oneself is a prerequisite for a unified identity (Hall, 1990). If a unified narrative cannot be constructed due to the lack of a sense of history and of belonging to a larger community, then a unified and coherent identity becomes impossible. Current identity crises and schizophrenic experiences disrupt people from constructing coherent narratives of themselves. Alasdair MacIntyre (1981/2: 205-6) argues that identity and memory are important as one's individual life is dependent upon membership of the larger community and sharing in the past of that community. The unity of the self is simultaneously achieved through moral identity in which individuals internalise the norms, values, morality, virtues, vices and mutual understandings of their community through the memory of the shared past and tradition

(MacIntyre, 1981/2: 205-9).

Identity and memory of the social self can be achieved through the realisation of the morality, virtues and norms of the past. Drawing from Bourdieu's notion of habitus, it is a crucially important point for us that dispositions, including value, morality, virtue and norm from the past, help people create a strong connection to their communities as well as to histories. In the next section, I will argue that the media image, especially realistic film texts, can be seen as resources of dispositions for audiences. Watching these films, in this sense, is an important way for audiences to recognise their identity and memory and to overcome postmodern identity confusion.

#### BRINGING BACK THE 'REALISTIC TEXT': *SPRING IN MY HOMETOWN* (1997, SOUTH KOREA)

Schizophrenic experiences result in people's wide feelings of anomie and in a crisis of identity in contemporary society. Through the recognition of these social, cultural and moral resources and dispositions, the crisis of identity can be alleviated. The mass media can provide a pivotal role in providing the resources and dispositions for audiences. Silverstone (1994) argues that the mass media can offer a stronger sense of 'ontological security' as the media furnishes a sense of being-in-the world. Drawing from Giddens' discussions of 'ontological security' and 'trust', Silverstone argues that active engagement in the world can be achieved in three ways: the first engagement is physical such as bodily presence, face-to-face interactions, communication, and language; the second is cognitive, for instance, understanding, memory, reflexivity, and an awareness of position in time and space; the last is affective engagement as in our relationships to material objects, to other people and to symbols (1994: 5-6). The media, especially in its use of realistic text, is an effective means of supplying cognitive and affective engagement by (re)constructing memory, mutual understanding, dispositions, virtue and morality, and reminding us of our affective engagement with certain cultural and historical objects and other members of communities. In this vein, I would maintain that *Spring in My Hometown* (1998) as an example successfully provides rich cultural resources for Korean audiences to track back their senses of history, place and society.

The film *Spring in My Hometown* (1998) narrates a locally shared past, that is, the Korean War in a realistic manner. As such, it seems to have



spoken to the concerns of a significant diversity of contemporary Koreans in ways that are artistically challenging and engage with the re-framing and re-construction of contemporary everyday experiences. Moreover, the film deals with social issues that have dominated the development of Korean identities and influenced individual Korean life to some degree in sophisticated ways. According to Standish, films do much more than just 'reflect', and 'they also actively explain and interpret the way in which the world is perceived and understood' (cited in Dissanayake, 1994: 65-6). It has to be said that the film challenges the dominant perspective and represents "reality" by including, rather than repressing, many differences within, and fragmentations of, the society.

*Spring in My Hometown* (1997, Yi Kwangmo dir.) achieved relatively huge success at the box office considering its genre as an art film. In 1999, the production won the Best Picture Prize at the 'Grand Bell Award', Korea's equivalent of the Academy Awards. The film also received the Grand Prix at the Vancouver Film Festival in 1998 and at the 52nd Locarno Film Festival in 1999. The film successfully constructs its own aesthetic style such as its distinctive mise-en-scene, mainly a dim yellowish colour, long-take and long shots, to narrate the story of Koreans' painful memory of the Korean War (1950-1953) and the division between the North and the South. The latter is culturally and historically specific and is resonant with Korean audiences.

The film portrays the Korean War as experienced in a small village in South Korea. However, it does not merely depict cruel and brutal images of war. Instead, the film subtly conveys both the painful experiences of war, the effects of invasion by US military forces upon the everyday life of ordinary people, and the virtues and morality that they displayed. Each scene carefully unfolds a shared history and memory of Koreans through its representations of landscapes and places, and lives of characters located within a larger social and cultural history.

The film is situated in a small rural town far from the battleground at the time when the Korean War was closed to ceasefire. Most of the people in the village appear to be peaceful – as if there is no war at all. However, several marks of war are seen here, there, and everywhere. These fragmented marks are powerful and terrible enough to ruin people's everyday lives. Instead of dramatising these as other popular genre films have done, the film carefully presents the traces of the war in the everyday lives of the Koreans, such as 'Red complex' among people, hatred towards communists, poverty, the sale of sex to

an American soldier in order to gain money for a father's medicine. On the other hand, the film unfolds virtues, mutual understandings, value, and morality during the hardest times for Koreans. Combining these two aspects, the film can provide rich cultural resources for Korean audiences to (re)construct the narrative of the self in relation to a larger society as well as history.

#### SEARCHING FOR THE MARKS OF THE KOREAN WAR

This film is a story about the experiences of the Korean War through the eyes of a boy, Sung-Min. Sung-Min and Chang-Hee are best friends even though Chang-Hee's family rents a small room in Sung-Min's house. Chang-Hee's father has been reported missing in the battlefield, which has led to Chang-Hee's family becoming increasingly impoverished. They have been unable to pay the rent to Sung-Min's family for a long time. In contrast, Sung-Min's father, Mr. Choi, is indebted to his daughter and her American boyfriend, First Lieutenant Smith, for getting him a well-paid job in the US military base. When Chang-Hee's father fails to return home from the prison camp, Mr. Choi's lucrative employment changes the economic situation of Sung-Min's family which has migrated from North Korea. Although Sung-Min's family enjoys a better living condition, they suffer emotionally from the fact that they have left the eldest son, Sung-Min's older brother, and other family members in North Korea.

Chang-Hee's mother was also able to get a new job with the help of Mr. Choi, washing US soldiers' underwear. However, when Chang-Hee's mother accidentally loses all the underwears one day, she is asked to have sex with a US soldier to recompense for the missing articles. Without having knowledge of these circumstances, the two boys happen to witness Chang-Hee's mother and the American soldier having sex, with Mr. Choi standing guard as her pimp. After this incident, Chang-Hee takes revenge on the soldier by setting fire to the mill, a secret place where the Americans go for sex. Chang-Hee then disappears. Despite the long search by American soldiers, Chang-Hee, is nowhere to be found. Chang-Hee's father eventually returns from the prison camp and begins to discover the circumstances behind Chang-Hee's disappearance. At this time, the decomposed body of a child is found in the village. Everybody, including children, believe that the body must be Chang-Hee. The children prepare a funeral and dig a small grave. Finally, Sung-Min's family have to run away from their

hometown when Sung-Min's father discloses the fact that he has been stealing goods from the US military base. During the night before Sung-Min's family's departure, Sung-Min dreams of Chang-Hee. Sung-Min believes that Chang-Hee must be alive somewhere.

The film mixes two perspectives: one is a distant and rather objective point of view from above; the other is Sung-Min's. Most scenes rely on the former through frequent long-take and long shots that play the role of providing an objective and distant perspective on the Korean War. On the other hand, the sequence of the whole story is narrated by Sung-Min and appears sporadically as a written commentary that is then combined with comments on historical facts between the film's twelve segments. The film faithfully follows the chronological order of events. The written commentary in portrayed events and actual historical facts play an important role in representing reality and in connecting individual lives to society and its history.

The film opens with a scene in which people violently apprehend a communist at the communal spring. One person, a teacher, is trying to dissuade people from both the condemnation and the assault in an attempt to save the communist. The communist, who is Sang-Un's father, is then whipped in front of his family including his son and daughter, by the townsfolk. As he is whipped, the camera angle is held at a long distance from the action in order to appear objective and to show that these violent incidents are daily events. The landscape, the sounds of a crying baby, a barking dog, and the people walking past are used to symbolise the characteristics of daily life. People fight, kill and discriminate against one another in everyday life. As the traditional sense of community breaks down, people no longer believe each other. The place where the communist was caught signifies the traditional communal place for everyone in the town. People traditionally gathered together, chatted and sustained close relationships at the communal well. However, in this scene the film deconstructs the traditional significance of the communal well, as it becomes a place that reconfirms a political cleavage amongst Korean people due to the war.

The cleavage, hatred and pain among Koreans at that time are portrayed through scenes such as that of the head teacher giving an aggressive address in the morning session of school as to how the communists (North Korea) should be defeated. Further scenes depict the sense of division amongst the Korean people: a demonstration against communists and ceasefire; Chang-Hee's mother selling most of clothes due to poverty brought about by the absence of her husband and the

war; a girl selling sex to an American soldier in order to get some money for her sick father; a teacher treating her student, Sang-Un, cruelly as Sang-Un's father had killed her parents during the war; Sung-Min's uncle longing for his mother in the North; Sung-Min's mother always worrying about her son, Hyun-Min, in the North; and Chang-Hee's father coming back from the prison camp in very bad health.

The visual representations of these scenes are well controlled through the prevention of the exaggeration of horrifying aspects of the war. The emotions and hardship of the characters are never made explicit: for example, the poverty of Chang-Hee's family is merely hinted at through the conversation of characters, and wounded Chang-Hee's father is only seen in the background. A scene of a girl selling sex is shown in a very long shot, and the pain of the divided family is symbolically presented through the image of a broken mirror. Also a beggar boy serves as a reminder of Sung-Min's lost brother. In terms of filmic technique, long-take shots function to show the everyday lives of Koreans in a more realistic and objective way. Minimising close-up shots and editing prevents the dramatisation of the violent past. Lengthy long shots prevent any sense of voyeuristic pleasure as they remove the explicit pictures of the horror and violence brought about by the Korean War as the emotional and physical aspects of the characters change in the horror, rape and violence. Voyeurism and eroticism in rape scenes are also avoided; for example, the camera shows a soldier and a girl entering into the mill and then stops when the two people are about to have sex. The long shots of the scene barely show either erotic movement or the bodies of the two people. This tendency has become even clearer in the sequence depicting the rape of Chang-Hee's mother. The long distance shots prevent the audience from recognising the face of the woman. The characters in the sequence remain unidentifiable, until Mr. Choi calls the woman by her name.

These negative pictures of the War are followed by rather hopeful aspects of everyday life that contain virtuous actions among Koreans such as that of Sung-Min sharing his lunch box with Chang-Hee; or of children playing around and helping one another although they sometimes beg for chocolates from US soldiers; Sung-Min's uncle showing sympathy as he secretly passes some rice to the commie's family. Other scenes show Chang-Hee always taking care of his sister and helping his mother; Mr. Choi always being a good father to Sung-Min. These are characteristic of the emerging theme of compassion that was seen in the scene of the children preparing a funeral and grave

for Chang-Hee after he has disappeared. After the police had found out a dead boy's body, Children believed that it must be Chang-Hee. Then, children prepare Chang-Hee's funeral all together; they are gathered to cut down a tree and to make his coffin. While children prepare for funeral, they wish Chang-Hee could live somewhere.

Girl 1: What if it (a dead body) is not Chang-Hee?

Boy 1: Chang-Hee is the only missing person in our village

Girl 1: Chang-Hee could run away.

Boy 2: How could he run away? If he did, he should have contacted us.

Girl 1: I wish it (a dead body) would not be Chang-Hee.

Boy 2: We all feel the same.

During a funeral parade, some of children ran to follow an American army jeep in order to beg for chocolates. However, there is the majority of children keeping a rank. Then, one boy questions, 'Is a chocolate that good? Are you real friends?' Similarly, Sung-Min's mother is shown giving some food to a beggar boy. These scenes represent pure and genuine friendship and the virtue of the community.

Various objects and incidents are used to trigger devices to portray hopes and virtues. The objects and incidents portrayed are those that are to be always situated within daily experiences and that occur in everyday lives. The lunch box suggests friendship between the two boys: since rice contains culturally specific meanings such as food in general, and life and hope for the future, it signifies not merely food or help, but also the possibility of forgiveness and compensation among people. Also, the warm father and son relationship between Mr. Choi and Sung-Min is shown through the homemade telescope which Mr. Choi has made for his son. Everyday images of a bicycle, a radio, and a school's sports day, and Chang-Hee's funeral loosely organised by children represent pure and genuine friendship and the virtue of the community. The director perhaps wants to show that even though the war ruined a lot of things, there are still beautiful things to be remembered. Indeed, the film concentrates on reflecting "reality" and the various faces of the war. It breaks down the stereotypical picture of the war and reconstructs alternative images of it. It remains a tragedy, but it is also seen as a beautiful time as long as people helped each other and did their best to keep their virtues and morality even in the hardest times.

Sung-Min's point of view takes the role of a commentary on the events in the text and makes a linkage between the events and wider

history. That is, all these happenings in the characters' lives are carefully located into larger historical forces and social structures. The text inserts Sung-Min's written commentary on the happenings and the big historical events of that time in order between sequences. The film begins in 1953, the late period of the Korean War and a year of the armistice. Sung-Min's family obviously comes from the North, yet has become a divided family due to the conditions of the armistice. For a long time, Chang-Hee's father has been unable to return home as he has been held as a prisoner at the Gujae prison, one of the biggest and worst prison camps in history. Strong anti-communism and Red-hunts can be found everywhere. The turbulent lives of Sung-Min's and Chang-Hee's families are closely related to the political, social and economic circumstances of the late stages of the Korean War. Moreover, the circumstances of war are relatively well presented through the portrayal of diverse groups of people, and their distinctive lives and identities. The two different groups, the rich and the poor, are shown through Sung-Min's and Chang-Hee's families. The experience of divided people is presented through Sung-Min's uncle's yearning for his mother who has been left behind in the North. The contrasting lives of communists and pro-American people are also introduced by comparing the lives of Sang-Un and Sung-Min's family.

The film, *Spring in My Hometown*, returns the audience to the relatively recent past. Diverse cultural artefacts and practices, familiar landscapes, the lights and sounds of a typical village, and daily practices and languages are combined with one another in the text in order to evoke and re-present the past. First of all, music as a cultural artefact is obviously important to signify nostalgia for the past (Powrie, 1997: 19). In the beginning of the film, a culturally embedded song, 'Spring in My Hometown' (I believe that the English title of the film comes from the title of the song), is used as a background music. Later, another scene shows children learning and singing this song in class. This song is perhaps the most culturally resonant song that is learnt by all Koreans in their childhood. The lyrics are as follows.

Flowers bloomed in my hometown, long time ago.  
Peaches, apples and apricots ... and pink blossoms too.  
Red and violet of the rainbow, flowers paint the town.  
I still long to go back to my hometown in the sun'.

Additionally, natural background sound, such as a barking dog, a

crying baby, the sound of the wind and the droning of a cicada, is also a very important device for memory construction.

Several recreations of children portrayed in film are also culturally resonant and nostalgic. There are such scenes as children watching stag beetles wrestling; children hopping and jumping, and children rolling a firing-can in winter.<sup>1</sup> All of these are considered to be traditional recreations that the Korean adults have played in their childhood. Several culturally embedded behaviours, such as the manner in which Sung-Min's mother treats her son when he feels unwell, and the way that Mr. Choi scolds at Sung-Min severely, are effective devices of nostalgia for childhood and the past.

Furthermore, numbers of culturally resonant settings and the contextualisation of these settings are used to touch upon the memory of the past. It is known that the director spent enormous time and efforts to find the typical scenery of a Korean village. After looking at more than 100 places, the director decided to shoot the film in Eui Ryong Gun, Kyung Nam which is the southern part of South Korea. In this sense, places portrayed in the film such as a communal well, a mill and a school, paths, brooks, hills and the sky – all familiar landscapes – are perhaps at once common and significant reference points for Korean audiences to feel connected to the particular time and space. In particular, children running along a small path, and women washing clothes while children swim in a brook are perhaps typical nostalgic images of that time. Such imagery is effective in representing the Korean people's own ways of living. Cultural objects such as a humble lunch box, a package of rice, traditional foods, chocolates from American troops, a lighter, a telescope, a mirror and a radio, are references to the feeling of nostalgia and are also used for the contextualisation of the text.

## CONCLUSION

I hope to have argued that the postmodern turn in social science has brought positive consequences: firstly, the postmodern sociology has broadened its areas into the inclusion of art, humanity, emotion, ethnomethodology, and hermeneutics, and secondly, this tendency within sociology would be more effective to grasp the rich contexts of

---

<sup>1</sup> This is a traditional recreation during winter in particular. At night, children play it by rolling a firing-can in order to fire winter fields

society and the social self. Given these, I have argued that the postmodern sociology should be balanced between too narrowly defined "scientific" perspectives and the extreme postmodern ones, and it can be more powerful once it reconciles with a realistic approach. Drawing on positive aspects of postmodernism, but still holding key elements of realism, I have maintained that the problems of identity in postmodern society can be solved, and, in particular, a realistic local film should be understood in more sociological ways in terms of its contributions to local audiences' anchoring their identities in history, place and society. As an example, I have closely analysed a film *Spring in My Home Town*, and I have argued that the film perhaps successfully presents the period and the everyday lives that belong to it. The text also achieves this by locating individuals into a larger social framework. In this sense, *Spring in My Hometown* taps into and artistically reconstructs memories of the past in ways that invoke parallels with and messages for contemporary experience and identity. In addition, the film uses artistic textuality, as is evident in its many long-take scenes, slow camera movements, lack of close-ups, limited artificial sounds, absence of dramatic changes of characters, and a peculiar lighting in-between yellow and green. These successful devices not only furnish the film with an artistic and authentic form, but also, more importantly, help spectators remember/ recapture the stories, experiences, and history of the Korean War. In this sense, this realistic local film is very important for audiences in terms of its cinematic achievements as well as its contributions to constitute rich cultural resources including local history, culture and memory.

## REFERENCES

- Anderson, W. T. ed. 1995. *The Fontana Postmodernism Reader*. London: Fontana.
- Ashley, D. 1990. "Habermas and the Completion of the Project of Modernity." B. S. Turner. ed. *The Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity*. London: Sage.
- Baudrillard, J. 1983. *Simulations*, Tr. P. Foss, P. Patton and P. Beitchman, New York: Semiotext/Freign Agent.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1988. *America*, Tr. C. Turner, London: Verso.
- Bauman, Z. 1996. "From Pilgrim to Tourist – or a Short History of Identity." Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay. eds. *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Pp. 18-36, London: Sage
- Bell, D. 1976. *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. New York: Basic.
- Berstein, R. ed. 1985. *Habermas and Modernity*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Best, S. and D. Kellner. 1997. *The Postmodern Turn*. New York: Guilford.
- Bordwell, D. 1985. *Narration in the Fiction Film*. London: Routledge.



- Bryant, C. G. A. and D. Jary. 2001. *The Contemporary Giddens: Social Theory in a Globalizing Age*. London: Palgrave.
- Callinicos, A. 1989. *Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Deleuze, G. and F. Guattari. 1977. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. New York: Viking.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Tr. B. Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Denzin, N. 1991. *Images of Postmodern Society*. London: Sage.
- Durham and D. Kellner. eds. 2001. *Media and Cultural Studies: Key Works*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Featherstone, M. 1988. "In Pursuit of the Postmodern: An Introduction." *Theory, Culture and Society* 5 (2-3): 195-216.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1991. *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*. London: Sage.
- Foster, Hal. ed. 1983. *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. Washington: Bay.
- Foucault, M. 1973. *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Pantheon.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1980. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other writings, 1972-1977*. Ed. C. Gordon. New York: Pantheon.
- Geraghty, C. 1991. *Women and Soap Opera*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Gergen, K. J. 1995. "The Healthy, Happy Human Bing Wears Many Masks." W. T. Anderson. ed. *The Fontana Post-Modern Reader*. London: Fontana Press.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1991. *The Saturated Self: Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life*. New York: Basic.
- Giddens, A. 1991. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Habermas, J. 1981. "Modernity versus Postmodernity." *New German Critique* 2: 3-14.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1987. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Hall, S. 1990. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." J. Rutherford. ed. *Identity: Community, Culture and Difference*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1992. "The Question of Cultural Identity." S. Hall, D. Held, and T. McGrew. *Modernity and Its Future*, pp 273-325, Cambridge: Open University Press.
- Harvey, D. 1990. *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hinchman, L. P. and S. K. Hinchman. 1997. *Memory, Identity, Community: The Idea of Narrative in the Human Sciences*. N. Y.: State University of New York Press.
- Jameson, F. 1984. "Postmodernism: or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." *New Left Review* 146.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1985. "Postmodernism and the Consumer Society." H. Foster. ed. *Postmodern Culture*. London: Pluto.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 1991. *Postmodernism, or, Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham, N. C. and London: Duke University Press.
- Kim, K. H. 2004. *The Remasculinization of Korean Cinema*. Durham: Duke University Press.

- Kim, S. K. 2006a. "The Renaissance of Korean National Cinema as a Terrain of Negotiation and Contention between the Local and the Global: Analysing Two Korean Blockbusters, *Shiri* (1999) and *JSA* (2000)." *The Essex Graduate Journal of Sociology* 6: 75-88.
- . 2006b. *Globalisation, Film and Authenticity: The Renaissance of Korean National Cinema*. Ph.D Thesis. Department of Sociology, University of Essex, UK.
- and R. Stones. 2007. "Film, Postmodernism and the Sociological Imagination: Exploring the Power of Local Stories in Southern Korea and Northern England." *Reconstructing Postmodernism: Critical Debates*. Nova Science.
- Lyotard, J. F. 1984. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report Knowledge*, Tr. G. Bennington and B. Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Macintyre, A. 1981/2. *After the Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. London: Duckworth.
- MacRobbie, A. 1985. *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*. London: Routledge
- Poster, M. 1995. "Postmodern Virtualities." M. Featherstone and R. Burrows. eds. *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk*, Pp. 79-95, London: Sage.
- Powrie, P. ed. 1997. *French Cinema in the 1990s; Continuity and Difference*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Silverstone, R. 1994. *Television and Everyday Life*. London: Routledge.
- Smart, B. 1990. "Modernity, Postmodernity and Present." B. S. Turner. ed., *The Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity*. London: Sage.
- Stones, R. 1995. *Sociological Reasoning: Towards A Post-Modern Sociology*, London: Macmillan.
- . 2002. "Social Theory, Documentary Film and Distant Others: Simplicity and Subversion in *The Good Woman of Bangkok*." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 5(2): 217-237.
- . 2005. *Structuration Theory*. London: Routledge.
- Storey, J. 2001. *Culture Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction* (3rd edition). Harlow: Prentice Hall and Pearson Education.
- . 2003. *Inventing Popular Culture: From Folklore to Globalisation*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Turner, B. S. (ed) 1990. *Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity*. London: Sage.

**SUNG KYUNG KIM** teaches film, media studies and sociology of culture in the Department of Literature, Film and Theatre Studies as well as the Department of Sociology at the University of Essex. She obtained her Ph.D in Sociology. She has published a co-authored chapter with Dr. Rob Stones entitled 'Film, Postmodernism and The Sociological Imagination: Exploring the Power of Local Stories in Southern Korea and Northern England' in *Reconstructing Postmodernism: Critical Debates* (2007). She is currently working on several papers on East-Asian cinema, national cinema, globalisation and cultural sociology.